

## So Polite by EvieSmallwood

**Series:** [the tales of short stack and string bean \[2\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, and who even invented the wheel?!, carrots and parrots?, el meets karen, emotional family moments, im sorry, its not, mashed potato contest: who's better, oh my!, stupid sibling banter, this sounds like a fucking crackfic, who needs ties when you look like john travolta?

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven, Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Karen Wheeler, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler

**Relationships:** Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-02-04

**Updated:** 2018-02-04

**Packaged:** 2022-04-20 16:36:34

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 3,543

**Publisher:** [archiveofourown.org](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary:**

*Love: an intense feeling of deep affection.*

If that's love, she's felt it for a long time.

## So Polite

### Author's Note:

- For [FateChica](#).

I'm posting for the second time in one day and you guys, I'm SO SORRY. I keep churning these out and after this I'll definitely be spacing these out (I don't want y'all to get sick of mileven lmao), but I couldn't resist.

Also this chapter is set when they're about 15!

I'm again gifting a work to my wife bc we decided it would be fun to destroy y'all with a bunch of fluff (also we've been dropping hints about our fics to each other ALL DAY and HERE IT IS BABE)

It's 5-3-0 when she arrives at the Wheeler doorstep. *Five thirty*. She knows how to say it properly, but the stubborn streak in her refuses to abide by the rules sometimes.

El rings the bell before glancing anxiously behind her. Hop's truck is already pulling away from the curb. He's so lucky he'd gotten out of this.

Well, maybe a vehicle collision on Main isn't exactly 'getting out', but...

She's nervous. A part of her would much rather tag along with him, because if there's anything El can't stand it's uncharted territory.

The door opens quicker than El expects, but it's not Mrs. Wheeler; it's Nancy, standing before her in a purple sweater, grinning. "Hey, El," she says, and the churning in El's stomach almost completely ceases. Nancy's voice has always been soothing to her. "You're here a little early."

El frowns down at the watch around her wrist. "It's five-thirty, right?"

“Well, yeah,” Nancy steps aside to let her pass, “but when my mom says five-thirty she really means six.”

“What?”

“I know,” Nancy shakes her head like it’s some great tragedy. “She runs on Wheeler Family Time, or whatever, though.” There’s a beat of silence, where El tugs nervously at her button up blouse, trying to absorb that. Nancy keeps going, though. “So, how are you?”

It’s only been two days since they last saw one another; she and Jonathan had given her and Will a ride to the arcade. But *formalities*, El reminds herself, and shrugs like she’s seen Max do a thousand times when confronted with this question. “Okay.”

Nancy opens her mouth to say more when they’re interrupted by the sound of heels on floor.

There stands Karen Wheeler, wiping her hands on a dishrag and smiling pleasantly, hair pinned up—looking more put together than Joyce ever has, or El’s own mother. She wonders how Karen has the time to do so much, but then remembers that cooking and cleaning and taking care of her kids is her job.

“Hi,” she greets, throwing a manicured hand out for El to take (El, with her nails bitten down almost to the quick, with her chipped polish and the faint white scar she has from the time she cut herself with a fishing hook). “I’m Karen, you must be Jane.”

El nods. “Most people call me El,” she says. It’s more of a statement than a request, as always—but so rarely does she find herself being addressed as anything but Jane outside of the party.

Karen is in the party, even if she doesn’t know that.

Karen nods. “For Eleanor, right?”

“That’s right.”

There’s a small lull, during which El feels almost like she’s been scanned; sized up by a woman she’s seen a thousand times. Worry twists her gut. *What if I don’t make the cut?*

Something buzzes faintly. Karen starts, hand flying to her chest like an actress from an old Hollywood movie. “Timer!” She explains, and then rushes off.

“She’s a lot, I know,” Nancy grins. “But she’s nervous too, I think. You *are* dating my dweeby brother, after all.”

El rolls her eyes. “He’s not dweeby,” she says, even though she knows Nancy doesn’t mean it. These last few weeks, Mike and Nancy have been spending almost every spare minute together, given that it’s her last month before she leaves for college.

El is going to miss her. *A lot.*

Nancy leads her deeper into the house, which El has seen plenty of times. She’s over almost every day, but it’s her first time here as something more than just a friend—one of the ignored, mingling constants. She’s Mike’s *girlfriend*. She’s...more.

“Is he upstairs?” El finds herself asking.

Nancy rolls her eyes. “Probably,” she says. “He’s been getting ready for like an hour.”

El grins, an expression which Nancy matches with ease. She can’t help but love that he’s nervous.

“I’m just gonna...”

“Yeah, go ahead,” Nancy waves her off. “Just don’t give him a heart attack.”

El hurries up the stairs. She’s only been in two of the Wheeler family bedrooms, and this time all of the doors are closed—but she knows where the bathroom is. El taps lightly on the door. “Mike?”

“Just a sec,” his voice calls back, muffled and a little strangled.

El waits precisely one second before tapping on the door again. “I’m coming in.”

“Wait, *what?* Who—?”

She undoes the lock with her powers and knows that's really all the answer he needs. The first thing she sees is the bathroom counter, which is a total mess; covered in both Nancy and Mike's belongings, stained with a bit of lipstick, and a little wet.

Thankfully, he's perfectly decent. More than decent. He's wearing *nice clothes*.

"Is that a tie?"

Mike blinks. "It's supposed to be."

She puts an end to the space between them, wrapping one arm around his neck and pulling on the striped fabric with the other. She lets it fall to the ground.

Mike flushes. "What was that for?"

"You don't need it," she says. "You're very cute already."

His face somehow goes even redder—the tips of his ears, too—and he grins. "I was going for dashing, but I'll settle for that."

She grins, practically against his lips. His arms are around her waist—solid and a little heavy, holding her tightly to him. With the leftover steam from the shower and just being around him, she feels incredibly warm.

He kisses her, lingering a little longer than normal to taste the cherry in her gloss, and then pulls back to rest his forehead against her own.

They don't even speak for a minute. There's something so lazy in the air around them. She feels like she could fall asleep standing up (or just about anywhere) as long as he's holding her.

Then he whispers, "I have to finish getting ready."

El pulls away to look at him with a wry smirk. "You could use a little more lipgloss."

"Yeah?" He cocks an eyebrow. "You willing to provide?"

And then he's kissing her some more—lightly but deeply. By the time he draws back she knows there's absolutely nothing remaining of the stuff on her lips.

Mike wipes his mouth. "Gone?"

"Yeah," she doesn't even mind.

Mike seems satisfied. El makes a space for herself on the counter and settles there, perched and watching as he runs a comb through his wet hair. She can't help but soak in the way it looks like that; slicked back and dark, so different from the usual mop of slight curls. Not that she would change it...

It's just nice to see him in a new way.

"You look like John Travolta in *Grease*," she tells him.

Mike snorts with laughter. "I so don't," he denies, even though he so *does*. A little.

El reaches out and runs her hands through it, and he leans into her touch, eyes closing. She loves that. She loves how much he trusts her, and needs her. She loves how certain she is that this won't ever change between them.

His hair falls out of its place where she touches it. El rakes her fingers against his scalp, which makes him sigh—

The door knob jiggles and they both jump.

"Mikey? Are you almost done? I need my scrunchies."

He lets out a low groan and drops his head against her shoulder. She knows they both feel sort of the same; they don't want to leave this room. They want to stay like this forever.

"Mikey?"

"Yeah, Holls," he unlocks the door for her and she hurries inside, lunging for a pack of brightly coloured hair ties but stopping short once she sees El. Holly looks between them.

“Were you two doing gross stuff?”

Mike rolls his eyes. “No,” he says, firmly.

But she seems satisfied enough. “Okay,” and then immediately afterward, in the careless and unstructured manner of speaking El has observed children use, “I need help.”

She’s looking at El, but it’s Mike who steps in. Maybe he senses her unease; she doesn’t know the first thing about fixing her own hair, much less anyone else’s. The most she can do is tie it back in a horrible knot. Joyce had pinned it back in a bun for her, tonight, thank god.

“Pony, or pigtails?”

“Piggies.”

Holly hands him the brush. Mike settles on the turned down toilet seat while she stands in front of him. They move like they’ve done this a thousand times, and maybe they have. She’s never seen anything like it before, really.

Mike runs the brush through Holly’s white blonde hair, parting it down the middle and then steadily gathering one bunch at the top of her head. Holly hands him a white scrunchie at just the right time.

“Do you have another white one?”

“I want pink on this side,” Holly says.

Mike doesn’t argue. El is completely and utterly transfixed by how easy and naturally he goes about the task.

When Holly’s done, she turns to El. “Pretty?”

It’s like an echo. El manages a nod and a smile, while Mike swoops in and grabs his baby sister around the waist. “Super pretty,” he says, and then blows a raspberry against the side of her head. It makes her squeal with laughter. “You’re gonna knock ‘em dead, kiddo.”

Holly grins with delight. “Thank you, Mikey.”

It's sweet, the way she presses a tiny kiss to his cheek and then runs out of the bathroom, mind already focused on her next objective (whatever it is). But El can't stop looking at Mike, even as he gets up and goes about putting his things away like it's no big deal.

And it is a big deal, because she realises just then—for the first time coherently, at least—that Mike Wheeler is perfect. He's always been perfect for her, always been just what she needs, but she hadn't realised that she doesn't just want him to be that way with her. She loves that he loves. She loves that he helps. He's so *good*. Good, and honest, and smart, and...

"I love you."

Mike loses his grip on Nancy's bottle of perfume. It's saved from shattering on the tile when El jerks her hand out to stop it.

But Mike isn't looking at the bottle. He's only looking at her—eyes wide, freckles standing out starkly against his now pale skin, mouth parted just slightly.

*Say something.*

"El—"

"Dinner!"

They both jump. El loses her mental grip on the bottle, but it only falls an inch or so, resulting in a simple noisy clatter rather than a puddle of floral scent and glass shards.

Mike swallows. "Um..."

El bites her lip. *Talk about it later.* "Yeah. Okay."

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She can hardly taste the food.

It's good. She knows it's good. But it's like her senses have dulled. She's so nervous, the lights in the Wheeler house have actually dimmed a little. Every time she thinks about what she said, they flicker.



Until Mike's hand comes down on her knee. He meets her eye and squeezes. *It's okay.*

Maybe he doesn't know if she's nervous about the dinner or him, but it soothes both of her worries enough for the lights to steady.

Karen sips her wine. "I'll have to call an electrician," she mutters. "So sorry, El. God, I feel like a disorganised mess."

El gives her an apologetic smile. "It's okay, Mrs. Wheeler."

"Karen," the older woman reminds her.

El nods. "Right."

She's Mrs. Wheeler to everyone else. It's just one more thing that makes El a little different from their friends. More than a friend.

Nancy clears her throat. "Dinner's amazing, mom."

"Thank you, sweetie." Karen is practically glowing, and obviously trying not to show it too much. El wonders, suddenly, the last time the Wheeler family really sat down for a meal like this. Mike has mentioned they've had take out and delivery because off all of the fighting; Karen is too put down to cook.

*But Ted's not here, now,* she thinks, glancing at the empty chair. *Working late.*

"Super yummy yummy," pipes up Holly. She's making a mountain of her food, smoothing down her potatoes and placing a carrot neatly on top. "If you don't like it you're a dummy. Food for my tummy."

Nancy raises an eyebrow. "What?"

"We're learning about rhymes in school," Holly explains, meticulously adding another carrot. "Teacher says to practise at home."

"So what rhymes with carrot?"

Holly beams, and it makes El grin. "Parrot!"

“Can you pass the salt, please, shortstack?”

El obliges, but her heart feels like it skips a beat (mostly because of the way Karen’s attention snaps from her green beans to El and Mike, all raised eyebrows and a transfixed, inquisitive gaze).

It doesn’t matter, though, because then the doorbell rings. They all start. Karen shoots out of her chair. “Who could that be?”

The answer comes in the form of Hopper, standing on the porch with a bottle of wine. “Hey,” he grunts, looking like he definitely doesn’t want to be here. “I brought, uh, merlot. Sorry I’m late.”

“Oh,” Karen blinks, takes the wine, and steps aside. “I was under the impression you weren’t joining us, I’m so sorry.”

Hopper shrugs. “I wasn’t, but, y’know. Accident cleared up, I had time to kill.”

He’s still in uniform, looking imposing almost, but El has never been more glad to see him. She doesn’t realise just how terrifying this whole situation is until he walks through the door and her shoulder’s sag with relief.

Mike sees this, though. Under the dinner table, his hand finds her own, and their fingers lace together like second nature.

Hopper nods at them. “Munchkins,” he greets, having adopted the nickname from Steve.

“Dad,” El rolls her eyes.

“Hi, Hop,” Mike grabs a plate and sets it at his father’s place, seemingly without hesitation.

Karen makes a small noise—something between a whine and a gasp. She covers her mouth. “Hiccup, sorry.”

If there’s one thing El’s learned about Karen Wheeler, it’s that she’s *always* apologising. For the weirdest things, too.

Nancy starts loading up Hopper’s plate for him. “The mashed

potatoes are super good,” she says. “Way better than that boxed stuff you made last month.”

“Yeah, sounds about right,” Hopper says. He ruffle’s El’s hair as he passes, and she doesn’t mind so much. It was feeling too tight, anyway.

“Is your name really Popper?” Holly asks.

Hopper grins. “That’s right. Chief Popper, at your service.”

Holly shakes her head. “I’d die.”

“Our last name is *Wheeler*, Holly,” Mike reminds her.

Holly leans forward. “What if our ancestors invented the wheel?”

Mike snorts. “No way. Probably just got it from some lame dude who put them on carts or something.”

“I mean yeah, probably,” she waves this off, “but *what if?*”

“I’d still be the biggest dweeb in school.”

“You are not a dweeb,” El says. God, she hates it when he says shit like that. It’s so far from the truth it’s almost laughable. “You’re very cute, stringy.”

Mike snorts a laugh, even as she rests her head on his arm. He shifts, though, wrapping it around her shoulder. Suddenly it feels more like they’re sitting in a booth at Benny’s, arguing about some stupid thing while Hopper glares at them all from the counter. She forgets they’re at a no doubt expensive kitchen table, eating a home cooked meal.

Until Karen clears her throat. “Would anyone like desert? Coffee, Chief?”

She looks pale, like she’s seen a ghost. El isn’t sure exactly why, but when their eyes meet, something passes between them. What’s mine is yours, what’s yours is mine.

“Sure,” Hopper swallows one of the few bites of food he’d managed.

“Coffee’s good.”

“Strawberry pie?” Holly asks.

Karen pushes back and stands. “Chocolate cake. That’s okay, right, you two?”

El nods. “Course.”

“Sounds great.” Hop’s mouth is full of food. El kicks his shin, and he grunts.

Karen doesn’t catch it, though. She’s already rushing out of the dining room.

As much as El wants to stay here, with her hand on Mike’s stomach as he bickers with his sisters, while Hop crams in as much of his meal he can, she finds herself slipping from Mike’s embrace anyway. “I’m gonna go help,” she tells him.

Mike nods, looking all understanding and loving and perfect. “Okay.”

Karen hasn’t even cut the cake, yet.

She’s standing with her back to the counter, shoulders shaking and crying silent tears. Every once in a while, a sniffle breaks through. It makes El wince.

“Mrs...Karen?”

The older woman jumps. Her hand flies to her heart again. “Oh! El! Hi, sweetie, sorry—”

“You don’t have to apologise,” El finds herself saying. For years to come, she’ll wonder what it was that made her understand, just then, exactly what Karen was crying about.

So many things, all bottled up. *How do they know one another so well? Why can’t Ted look at me like that? What have I missed? Where did my baby boy go?*

And it's that understanding which prompts El to close the distance between her and Karen Wheeler and wrap her arms around the woman, taking in her Chanel perfume and lilac smelling shampoo. Karen is stiff for a total of two seconds before embracing El back. Maybe it's an automatic, motherly thing; but the continued crying says otherwise, and so El stays right where she is.

After a few minutes, though, Karen pulls away. She wipes her cheeks, mascara still miraculously in place, and gives El a watery smile. "Thank you," she says. It means so many things.

El shrugs. She isn't a hugger. She doesn't do physical contact, at least not often or with anyone outside the party, but this felt... good. It felt right.

"You're welcome," she says. It means a lot of things.

They cut the cake, pieces perfect. Picture perfect. But pictures don't always tell the whole story.

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"So."

The front door closes behind Mike. It's the perfect spring evening; sky tinged with purple and pink, stars visible, trees swaying in a slight breeze. The sound of wind chimes on a neighbor's front porch reach El's ears.

Nothing, though, compares to the sight of Mike. His hair has already dried and curled, back to its normal almost-mess. She can see every freckles standing out against his pale skin, and she knows every emotion swirling in his eyes, because she feels it too.

"Dinner was good," El tells him, knowing it's something he needs to hear.

He nods. El watches a bit of tension bleed out of his shoulders. He glances at his shoes, before taking her hand.

When his gaze meets her own again, it's darkened. Magnetic energy. Warmth pulsates from him to her, her to him. "So," he says again.

“Hi.”

El gets close enough to brush his nose with her own, even if she has to stand on her toes to do it. “Hi.”

She knows before he says it. She thinks she’s always known. It’s sort of always been there, since that night in the rain. Since he took her hand, asked if she was okay. Gave her his jacket and always just *got it*.

“I love you.”

El’s chest explodes with butterflies anyway. The world could absolutely fall apart around them and she wouldn’t even notice.

She doesn’t even know what to say. It’s a feeling that she’s constantly combating, but this time, she gives in. Their lips meet in the middle and her heart stops.

She wraps her arms around his neck, lets him pull her close, and deepens the kiss. His mouth opens against her own and she really has no desire to pull away until—

“You know, I do own a firearm.”

They jerk apart. El’s cheeks flush. *Shit. Dad.*

*And Karen.*

Hopper is grinning, though. “I’m only kidding, I would never.”

“Not if you have any desire to live,” El finds herself retorting. Mike laughs.

“We gotta go, kid,” Hopper says, totally unfazed. “I have to pick up that thing for you know who.”

Karen’s eyebrows shoot up, which is precisely why Joyce is *you know who*, and Mike throws El an exasperated glance. “Fifty bucks says they’re married by the end of the year,” he mutters.

“I heard that.” Hopper brushes past them both.

“Double or nothing says they’re already secretly dating,” Mike adds, purposefully louder.

Hopper turns on his way to the car and salutes. El blinks. “What does *that* mean?”

“Hell if I know.” Mike rolls his eyes, glances at his mom, and then swoops in to press a kiss to El’s cheek. It’s chaste, but warm. “Bye, shortstack.”

“Bye,” she returns, even though goodbye doesn’t really mean goodbye. It means: *talk to you in half an hour on the supercom.*

“Thanks for dinner, Karen.”

Mike’s mom smiles, warm and genuine. “Anytime,” she says.

And maybe this time what’s said is what’s meant. El nods, hurrying to catch up with Hopper. She slips inside the car and switches on the radio with a quick twitch of her head.

Hopper reaches over to turn it down. “Good time?”

“Yeah,” she nods. “Really good.”

### **Author's Note:**

I cried while writing this. Deeper meanings, man.

This fic is named after Summer Salt’s “So Polite”, which is really good. Everything by them is really fucking good.

Hopper’s in a great mood, I wonder what he could be buying...

My tumblr is @madmaxinemayyfield if you guys wanna shout at me about mileven, or music, or whatever! Pls... come shout at me... or just say hello...